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KHPA urges Congress to review federal citizenship guidelines for medical benefits *Guidelines are threatening health care access for Kansans*

The Kansas Health Policy Authority Board has sent a letter to members of the Kansas Congressional delegation asking for their assistance in addressing problems caused by the new Federal requirements for Medicaid recipients that document citizenship and identity.

“These Federal guidelines have restricted the accessibility of health care to thousands of Kansans, which unfortunately, defeats the purpose of federally funded medical benefits,” Marci Nielsen, Executive Director of the Kansas Health Policy Authority said. “We want to encourage our Congressional delegation to work with the new Congress to review this legislation to mitigate its impact on eligible citizens and state administrative operations. Our goal is to meet with our delegation and work with them on these issues and discuss policy alternatives. No eligible Kansan should be without care.”

Created under the Deficit Reduction Act of 2006, these requirements require any person applying for federally funded medical benefits to document both citizenship (or legal presence) and identity in order to be enrolled.

“We need assistance in addressing our concerns about the impact these requirements are having on beneficiaries and on our administrative operations,” Chairperson Connie Hubbell wrote in the letter sent on December 7. “The requirement to submit these documents has posed significant obstacles to applicants and has overloaded the state’s enrollment process, leading to significant declines in caseload.”

Applicants must now invest more time, effort, and sometimes, money to track down documents that may include passports, birth certificates, picture IDs. The Medicaid enrollment process, principally the Kansas Family Medical Clearinghouse, has been deluged with paper, faxes, mail, phone calls, and voice mail, and application review times have increased. The result is a backlog and a decline in caseload of approximately 18,000-20,000 individuals, comprised predominantly of children and young families, and including many who will ultimately succeed in demonstrating their citizenship and eligibility.

Chairperson Hubbell wrote, “While we understand the purpose of the new law was to increase citizenship verification, we must point out that the impact of the law in our state is falling disproportionately on eligible Kansans. We are particularly concerned about the impact on unsuccessful or delayed applicants who may have difficulty accessing health care services, and the impact on safety net providers who will ultimately bear many of the costs for those who are uninsured as a result of the law.”

Nielsen will be in Washington, D.C. on February 14, 2007 to meet with the delegation and will be inviting interested members of the Kansas Health Policy Authority Board and Legislative Oversight Committee.

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